



NEWS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Office of the Secretary

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: July 24, 2001

INTERIOR SECRETARY TO ORDER WATER RELEASE TO KLAMATH FARMERS

(PORTLAND) Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton made the following statement today at a media briefing in Portland, Oregon:

"I am happy to announce that about 70,000 to 75,000 acre-feet of water will be released from Upper Klamath Lake to assist farmers in the Klamath Basin Project in desperate need. They may be able to use the water for their livestock, to provide some critical recharge for some wells, and perhaps save pastures, alfalfa and hay, or even row crops that have recently lost their well water supply.

"The reason I am taking this action is because the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) has been taking measurements and has determined that Upper Klamath Lake is at a higher level than projected. This is due in part to irrigators above the Klamath Basin Project who have been able to conserve more water than previously projected and, thanks to Mother Nature, the scattered thunderstorms that have provided much-needed rain to the area and the Lake.

"Water could be released as early as tomorrow, but the timing will be coordinated between the Bureau of Reclamation and the Irrigation Districts.

"The Bureau of Reclamation will divert all the water released to contractors within the Klamath Basin Project. The Irrigation Districts will then be responsible for deciding on the allocation and distribution of the water, under their contracts with BOR. It's estimated that about 10,000 acre-feet of the total will be needed to prime the canal system for the releases.

"Unfortunately, none of this water will reach the National Wildlife Refuges because there simply is not enough water to do more than provide a little relief to some desperate farm families during the remainder of this season. In the months ahead, we'll be looking at a number of options to assist the over-wintering bald eagles. These may include seeking new sources of groundwater, purchasing water from willing sellers, and developing plans for supplemental feeding.

"I recognize that this is a only a small step toward providing help to farming communities in great need.

"We are committed to working with all interested parties in the current mediation process. We hope that this process will ultimately lead us to solutions that avoid a repeat of this situation next year and in the future. And we're grateful to the Oregon delegation and particularly Senator Gordon Smith and Congressman Greg Walden for the long hours of hard work that they and their staffs have put in to help the people of the Klamath Basin."

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